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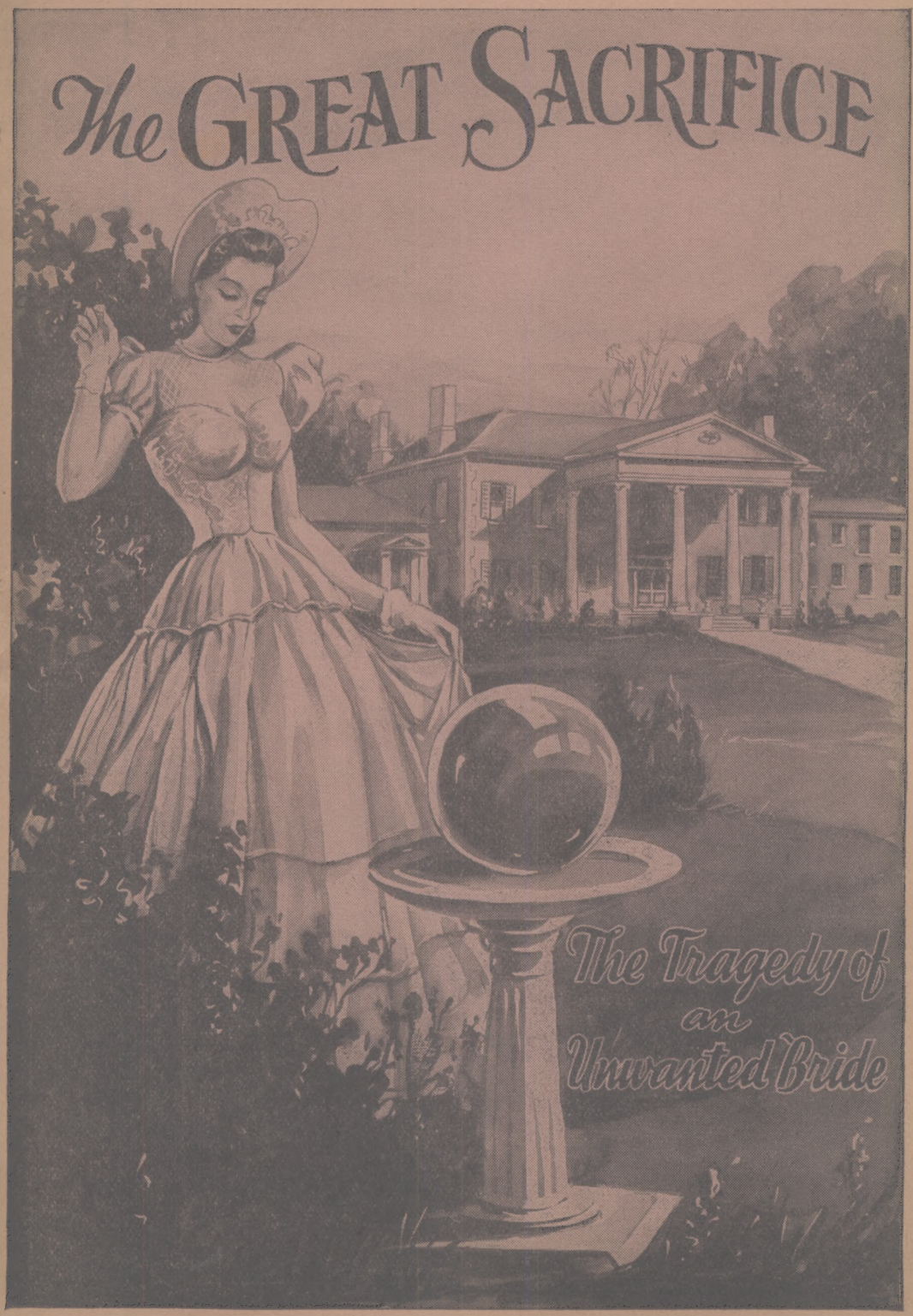

The Tragedy of an Unwanted Bride

He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. "Kiss me again," she murmured.

No. 23

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Chicago, Ill.

COUNT HARCOURT had some very good reasons for not hastening the court proceedings. He was afraid that he would lose the case.

The world knew that Lola had been a good and faithful wife. Not a word of slander could be whispered against her. For certain reasons he feared to face her in the presence of an honest judge. It was his purpose to delay the case until he could find another man to occupy the bench — a man who would decide in his favor, right or wrong.

Then there was another, and a more important factor to be reckoned with. Armand Duverne, his brother-in-law, had recovered from the wound inflicted during their duel.

Lola's brother would go to any extreme in order to see him defeated in a court of law.

Count Harcourt ground his teeth in impotent rage whenever he hought of him. For Armand Duverne had a host of loyal friends in Tunis as well as in Paris.

And so the matter dragged on with the count doing everything he could to retard the case.

As he always did when perplexed and in some sort of trouble, he sought solace in the company of some fair female. Since lovely Mignon Faraget was his latest passion, he naturally went to see her.

The girl received him pleasantly enough. For he had not called on her for a whole week.

"Ah, I thought you had forgotten me entirely," she said as she led the way into the cozy sitting room. "What excuse have you to offer for neglecting me like this, Felix?"

"I have been very busy with government affairs," he told her, taking a seat beside her on the divan.

"But you should not forget me," the girl pouted.

"How could I?" He took her in his arms and kissed her with unwonted fervor. "You ought to realize that it is not the best thing for us to be seen together so much now. People will talk, you know. Our love affair must not become the sole basis for my wife's desired divorce. I don't want all the blame. Damn it!" he added viciously. "I wish I could get something on her!"

Mignon laughed softly, then asked:

"How is your wife's handsome brother? I was told that he is quite well again. Is that true?"

"Oh, yes," he answered with a dark frown. "Armand Duverne is now in the best of health. Most of his time is spent searching for that blond girl. He does not suspect that we are hiding her here. He is desperately in love with Joan. That is one of the reasons why I called. I want to talk to you about her."

"Well?" Mignon Faraget gave him a sidelong glance.

"It is just this way," the count went on, leaning back comfortably, "Armand Duverne must not be provided with a weapon against me. He would become dangerous if he suspected that we are hiding Joan in your house, and that I tricked her into coming here.

"You know," he went on earnestly, "there would be the very devil to pay if he found out the truth. I have been informed that he engaged a private detectiv to help him find Joan.

"This must be prevented no matter what the cost. Therefore I have come to the conclusion to send the girl away. Of course, I am counting on you in this matter. You are the only one I can depend on now. You'll help me, won't you?"

Nothing suited Mignon better than being rid of Joan. This blond young beauty's constant presence

under her roof had tried her patience.

"I'll be very glad to get rid of her," she announced with some bitterness in her voice. "You don't know how tired I am playing the jailer. That girl gets on my nerves."

"Why didn't you tell me that before, Mignon?"

"What would have been the use?" the latter countered. "I did not want to burden you with my complaints. And your orders were to keep her here until further notice. Naturally it was up to you."

"Well, that girl has to go," Count Harcourt said determinedly.

"But where will you take her, Felix?"

He shook his head.

"I haven't thought about that yet, my dear. But you are shrewd, Mignon. Help me solve that problem. Can't you?"

"Certainly," replied the girl. "I'll do my best." She remained in silent thoughtfulness for a few moments, then went on: "I think I have an idea. You want Joan to disappear from this city and this part of the world, don't you?"

"Yes, Mignon. I won't breathe easy until she has been placed out of the reach of any snooping private detective."

"Suppose she were shipped to America?" Mignon suggested. "Would that suit you?"

"Splendid, if it can be done."

"Oh, I can get away with it alright."

Count Harcourt stared at the speaker with something like wonder and admiration in his eyes.

"Of course," Mignon continued, "I shall need a little help."

"But I am afraid I can't give it to you."

"You don't have to Felix."

"Then who——"

She cut him short with:

"Recently you took a certain man into your office. I mean Apache Charley. He is as clever as he is tricky. Send him to me with the order that he is to obey me implicitly. Leave the rest to me. I shall need a considerable sum of money. You'll supply that, I presume."

"Indeed, I will," the count answered readily. "You can depend on me to furnish the money."

For some time they discussed the details in connection with their next move, then Count Harcourt, after depositing a large roll of bills on the table, took his departure.

He returned at once to the governmental palace and sent for Apache Charley. Alone and undisturbed, the latter listened very attentively to his master's instructions.

That he was pleased could be seen in the beaming of his ugly face.

Most of his answers to the count's questions were an anxious and emphatic "Yes!" For he was too shrewd to admit the least degree of temerity.

When this interview was over, Apache Charley dressed with utmost care and hurried to the villa occupied by Mignon Faraget.

The girl received him like an old friend. She showed him into the sitting room, lit a cigarette, then offered one to him. He grabed for it with a wide grin of appreciation.

"Now then," Mignon began after they were both seated, "I'll tell you why Count Harcourt sent you to me. But perhaps he has already told you."

"He has not," the scoundrel lied.

"Well, it wouldn't matter," the girl went on, rather doubting the man's statement. "I need you in a

matter which requires tact and absolute secrecy. You will be well paid for your part of the work. Rest assured of that. Can I depend on you?"

Apache Charley nodded vigorously.

"Alright," Mignon continued. "Now listen. For some time I have been hiding a young woman here in my house. I must get rid of her as soon as possible for certain reasons. The most effective way is to ship her out of the country.

"You know, Charley," she went on in the friendliest manner and focusing her lovely eyes on his, "I have always had the strange feeling that I could count on you in case of need.

"And I don't mind telling you that I heard about you long before you ever thought of meeting me here in Tunis. Of course, some of the reports were not entirely in your favor. But what of that? We all have our little weaknesses."

The outlaw made a wry face.

This was hardly the kind of a conversation to put him at ease But before he could make a response, Mignon was speaking again.

"I happen to know among other things that you have been in America, Charley," she said. "In fact you were in New York several times. And you no doubt have a number of friends there. How would you like to pay them a visit with all your expenses paid and a nice sum in the bargain?"

"Ah, I am your man," he cried, his thin lips compressed greedily.

Mignon watched him closely.

"And I shall pick your traveling companion," she went on. "She is none other than the girl I spoke of a moment ago. You may chose your own steam ship line. I don't care if you smuggle her aboard a tramp steamer

I don't care what becomes of her. But she must disappear within three days."

Apache Charley grinned diabolically.

He had guessed instantly who this young woman was. He had seen her the night Donald Whitney was re-arrested after escaping from prison.

He would have given a great deal to know why this beautiful creature must be smuggled out of the city.

No doubt Count Harcourt was in some way connected with this. And he furnished the money. In fact the latter had admitted as much less than an hour ago.

But Apache Charley was not in the habit of asking questions that would probably never be answered. By a peculiar trick of fate he had wormed himself into the good graces of the Governor of Algeria.

Instead of being confined in prison to which he had been sentenced to spend the rest of his natural life, he was a free man.

And he was offered an opportunity to earn big money with a chance to travel besides. Nothing could have suited him better.

Perhaps the strangest twist of fate consisted in the fact that this lovely young woman who had been snatched away from him and Red Bill that night in the Black Horse Inn, was to be returned to him.

No conditions were attached. He could do with her as he pleased so long as she was removed from the city.

In a few words he made it known that he was willing to undertake the task. His demand for advance money Mignon Faraget complied with at once. For another fifteen minutes they talked in whispers, then the outlaw took his departure.

Mignon stood looking after him for a long while. While she was quite willing to use him to further her

own ends and those of Count Harcourt, she secretly despiced him.

She considered it a stroke of luck to be able to send him out of the country with Joan.

But she did not dream for a moment that Apache Charley might have some plans of his own. Nor had she fully realized as yet what a dangerous man he was.

Chapter 84

TRAFFIC IN SOULS

APACHE CHARLEY was highly elated over the bargain just made. And this was not the first time he showed such willingness to take a pretty young woman off somebody's hands. During his reign in the Montmartre much of the money he spent so freely was gained by sending some poor unsuspecting girl to a place from whence no woman ever returned the same as she entered.

Once more he was in a position to fill his pockets with yellow gold through the same method.

He knew the man to do business with. This man, one Sidney Adler by name, was one of the unspeakable brutes who trafficked in human flesh.

In no other city of the whole world was the white slave traffic bound to flourish as in Tunis, the capital of Algeria. If the government officials had knowledge of this, they did not take the trouble to interfere.

And what could be expected with a man like Count Harcourt directing the city's welfare.

We, who live in the cleanest and the most prosperous country in the world, hear little about the horror of white slaving. We don't like to hear about it. We don't like to read about it. And yet, it flourishes in our very midst.

Those parents who have never lost a young daughter through this nefarious trade frankly admit that they don't believe that white slavery is possible in America.

They have never stopped to ask the question what becomes of the many young women who disappear without leaving a trace and never return.

But numerous cases may be cited where such a thing happened. The small country towns suffer just as much as the large cities. Perhaps more so. The average big city girl reads about it in the newspapers.

When they read, for instance, how a young woman was heard screaming in a fast moving automobile, they find something to think about.

Very few of them will answer a fake advertisement where pretty young girls are wanted for the stage or the screen. Those who do have cause to regret it.

It is a fact nevertheless that every year hundreds of our young women become victims of white slavers. If a few have a chance to return and tell their awful tale, they are ashamed to do so.

Few, if any, have the moral courage to admit that they were duped. None will admit their shame.

Perhaps some of our readers would be shocked if they were told that young American women are carried away every year by boatloads to other lands for no other purpose than being compelled to lead a horrible life.

Some of them may go to South American cities. Some of them may go to China, Australia or Africa. Some, no doubt are landed in Tunis.

On one of the streets in the latter city stood a big house owned by Sidney Adler. To the left of the front entrance was a large brass sign which read: "Employment Office".

No one ever troubled to find out what this big house was being used for outside of that.

On the face of it it must seem strange, in the first place, that an employment office should be found in such an out of the way locality.

In the second place, it should have aroused suspicion that nothing but female help was ever wanted and asked for.

If the young woman in search for work was homely, she was asked to leave her name and address. That was the last of it. But if she was pretty and had a good figure, a position was immediately found for her.

The lady in one of the apartments upstairs needed a maid or a cook or a companion. The liberal salary offered always attracted an applicant.

But before the girl was finally engaged, she was given a week to furnish references. And during that week the agents of Sidney Adler found out all about the girl, her family connections and previous record.

If she was "safe" she was hired.

And once hired, her fate was sealed. It would furnish reading matter of a revolting nature to dwell upon the horrible methods used in order to make these girls submissive.

The woman in charge of the employment office was well fitted for the position she held. She had no soul and no pity for her own sex.

She seemed to take diabolical pleasure in dragging members of her own sex down to her low level. Her avaricious character, hard nature and greed for gold utterly precluded any possibility of feeling sorry for her victims.

Sidney Adler, a beast in human form, sold these girls to houses of ill fame and rich men. They were nothing but slaves.

Adler did not confine his activities to one city. He could be found anywhere — Paris, Vienna, London or New York. And it was while in Paris that he had come in personal touch with Apache Charley and the latter's gang.

It was quite natural, therefore, that this notorious French outlaw should seek out Sidney Adler in the matter involving a beautiful young woman like Joan.

The night Apache Charley was on his way to call on him, Sidney Adler sat in his luxuriously furnished den, smoking a long black cigar.

He was a man past middle age, with singularly attractive features. The gray hair about his temples gave him a fatherly look.

He was a thick set man with huge shoudlers. His eyes, almost coal black, were the most deceiving thing about him.

They expressed kindliness and generosity. They were the mask behind which he hid his abnormal cruelty and tigerish ferocity.

And woe to the woman who aroused his anger by refusing to do his bidding. No blood-thirsty Arab or licentious Turk was this man's equal in utter relentlessness.

To-night Sidney Adler appeared to be in an unusual good mood. Therefore he did not frown when a servant disturbed him.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," the servant announced.

As a rule an announcement like this brought a quick series of questions from the master of the house. But he did not get a chance to ask a single one.

For Apache Charley had taken the liberty to come in right on the heel of the servant.

"Hello, Sidney!" the scoundrel greeted, coming forward, his hand extended like an old friend.

"Why, it is Apache Charley!" cried Adler, rising from his seat and running to meet the unexpected visitor. "How are you? Glad to see you. Sit down and have a cigar."

Apache Charley did both. He dropped upon a chair, then lit a cigar, while the other watched him narrowly.

"I suppose it is useless to ask you what you are doing here in Tunis," Adler said after a pause. "I heard you managed to ingratiate yourself with Count Harcourt, the Governor."

"Yes, we are good friends," replied the other, puffing complacent at his cigar.

"Lucky dog. How in the world did you get away with it?"

"Just brain, Sidney. Just brain and a little luck."

For a little while both men smoked in silence. Sidney Adler's curiosity prompted him to inquire:

"What brought you here, my friend?"

"A little matter of business," Apache Charley answered. "And you'll be pleasantly surprised when I tell you about it. Well, to make a long story short, I can lay my hands on the most beautiful young woman you ever feasted your eyes on, Sidney.

"Nevermind who she is and what her connections are. That is my secret. I don't think, however, it would interest you very much if I told you What you are concerned about is the question whether she is safe. Well, I don't mind telling you that she is.

"This young woman," the apache went on, smacking his lips, "is being hidden in Tunis. But she must be made to disappear within three days. I have been commissioned to bring that about. As I said before she is perfectly safe. You know what that means. Nothing to worry about."

"How old is she?" asked Adler, interested at once.

"Twenty at the most. I think she is just about nineteen"

"Is she here in this city alone, Charley?"

"Yes, absolutely alone."

"No relations or close friends to interfere?"

"None, Sidney."

"That sounds good," the latter mused, his eyes taking on a peculiar expression. "Tell me some more about the girl."

Apache Charley laughed.

"Well, there is nothing more to tell," he cried, slapping his knee. "As I told you before, she is a real beauty. She was turned over to me by — by a certain person of high rank. It is up to me to see to it that she disappears from Tunis within three days."

The white slaver nodded, evidently quite satisfied. After a moment he asked:

"How about this girl, is she of an easy going nature or is she hard to handle? In other words, is she likely to give me trouble?"

"I don't think so," the other replied. "She is of the sweet, trustful kind. Of course, you'll have to tell her the usual fairy tale in order to persuade her to come your way. You can take her any place you want to. But in my opinion New York would be the most safe."

Sidney Adler considered the suggestion.

"Well, it will probably be New York," he declared. "And the girl will travel with me as my daughter. Now let's get down to brass tacks, Charley. What's your price?"

"Five thousand," was the sum demanded.

"You are crazy!" cried the white slaver. "I won't give you half that much. Two thousand is all I'll offer you."

Apache Charley made a break for the door. But he was only bluffing.

"No use wasting my time with you, Sidney," he called over his shoulder. "I know someone else who will

pay my price. You are a piker. Goodby."

"Wait a minute," Adler called after him "I will make it three thousand. You shall have half of it spot cash right now, and I'll pay you the other half after I have seen the girl."

The outlaw retraced his steps, and then began the usual haggling. Finally they came to an agreement.

Sidney Adler's evil eyes glowed as he listened to another description of Joan's wonderful loveliness of face and figure. He paid Apache Charley two thousand cash. Another two thousand was to be handed over as soon as he had convinced himself personally of the girl's beauty.

Chapter 85

VILE TRICKERY

SINCE her imprisonment at the villa occupied by Mignon Faraget, poor Joan had tried desperately to break through the wall which stood between her and the past. At times her mentality seemed to improve and she was able to recall an incident or two in a rather hazy manner. She knew that she had been happy with some man, whose name she could not recall, however.

This change in her mental condition was responsible for her centering every thought upon this one object.

Armand Duverne had become a secondary consideration. Somehow she gained the idea that she would not go back to him even if she were liberated from her present prison.

In her ears still droned the sound of that voice — the voice of the man who had been so near but a short time ago. Intuition seemed to tell her that this man had played a tremendous role in her life.

Ah, if she could only remember his name!

Joan had nothing to complain of since coming to Mignon Faraget's villa. She was treated kindly enough by the latter, although she was never able to remove the suspicion that her jailer was being paid by Count Harcourt.

The incident in which the count had played such an ignoble part she wanted to forget. And she hoped fervently she would never see that man again.

One afternoon Mignon Faraget came into the room with a very pleasant smile on her face.

"My dear," she said in the most persuasive manner and placing a hand affectionately upon Joan's shoulder. "I want to talk to you for a little while if you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?" Joan answered, her lips drooping pathetically at the corners. "I am past minding anything."

"I wouldn't talk that way, Joan," the other woman protested mildly. "Surely I have done everything I could to make your stay here agreeable. I know it is horrible to keep you shut off from the outside world, virtually a prisoner. But I am forced to——"

"Yes, I know all that," Joan said wearily. "You have told me that before."

"So I did," Mignon agreed. "But don't blame me too much. I am a woman like you are. I am a victim of circumstances the same as you. The only man I loved is dead In that respect you are better off than I am."

"Why?" asked Joan.

"You told me more than once lately that you are trying to remember the name of a man you must have loved dearly. I wish I could help you. And I am going to help you."

"No one can help me," murmured the unhappy girl disconsolately. "I only wish I were free."

Mignon Faraget looked up quickly.

"Suppose you were free?" she inquired with stealth. "What would you do?"

"I'd go to America," Joan announced, her eyes lighting up suddenly. "Something seems to tell me that I will find someone there who can——"

"You are right!" cried Miss Faraget. "You are indeed right, my dear. I was only trying you out. Now

listen, I am the bearer of some good news. To-morrow you are to leave this house. You will be taken aboard a steamer that is to take you to New York. And there you will find the man of whom you have been dreaming."

Joan stared at the speaker, her heart filled with conflicting emotions; her mind working feverishly to break through the cloud still shrouding it.

But before she could give utterance to the idea that just occurred to her, Mignon spoke again.

"I don't want you to think hard of me," that deceitful person began in the previously assumed persuasive tone. "Appearance were against me. If I kept you a prisoner in this room for so long, it was because I had no alternative. I am in the power of a man who can crush me if I refuse to obey. I am——"

During the next fifteen minutes Joan listened to a lengthy speech of Mignon Faraget who was trying to justify her action.

She spoke convincingly. Sympathy and a sincere desire to make amends punctuated her every word.

And she ended up with this:

"Quite accidentally I met an American gentleman a few days ago. In the course of our conversation I mentioned your case. It seemed to interest him very much. When I told him that you were also an American, he at once suggested taking you back home with him. Would you like to go, Joan?"

The latter clapped her hands like a happy child.

"Oh, nothing could suit me better," she exclaimed. "I am anxious to go. Who is the man?"

"His name is Sidney Adler," came back the information accompanied by a furtive glance. "He is a Wall Street broker. And a mighty fine old gentleman he seems to be. I know you'd be perfectly safe with him, my dear."

Joan could not remember ever having heard that name before. But that did not matter.

"I am no afraid," she murmured. "When does this Mr. Adler leave for New York?"

"To-morrow," was the prompt response. "That means I must help you get ready for your trip. Luckily you are about my height and you can wear my dresses. But I have not yet made any final arrangements with Mr. Adler. I want you to meet him before you consent to go with him."

"Oh, I shall be glad to meet him, Mignon. When is he coming?"

"To-night."

That ended the conversation for the present. Joan, feverish with excitement and anticipation began making preparations for her trip to America.

Stronger and stronger grew the hope of meeting the man of her dreams in her home land.

That same evening shortly after eight, Mr. Sidney Adler was presented to her by Mignon Faraget.

The man's eyes lit up with amazement and evil desire as he held Joan's small white hand in his. Apache Charley had told the truth. This young woman was the most bewitchingly beautiful creature he had ever seen.

Joan, on her part, took an instant liking to the man. He was not so old as Mignon Faraget had led her to believe.

His voice was pleasant, and his manner engaging. All in all he appeared to be a fatherly kind of a gentleman into whose hands she felt she could trust herself.

"Ah, this is a genuine pleasure!" he cried. "And it is far more than that, my dear child. You remind me strongly of my own daughter whom I lost a year ago while traveling in Italy. She was the——"

Sidney Adler paused and actually wiped a real

tear from his eyes.

"Pardon me for giving way to my emotions like this," he apologized. "You see, Sarah was my only child. She was operated upon for acute appendicitis and she did not survive. She was pretty and blond like you. This unexpected meeting with you makes me very happy."

"I am happy, too," responded Joan. "And I am indeed sorry. But if you will let me, I'll be a daughter to you on our trip to America."

The man grinned.

This was just the thought to which he had been about to give expression. For certain reasons it was desirable that this lovely creature should travel as his daughter.

"A daughter to me?" he cried, taking a hold of both of Joan's hands and pressing his lips upon them. "This is far more than an old sinner like me deserves. Nothing could please me more than to have you call me 'Daddy'. It is so long since——"

Again he paused. And again he wiped a tear from his eyes.

During this exchange of words Mignon Faraget had become a most interested listener. There was no need for her to add anything in favor of Sidney Adler.

This man knew how to win most any woman's confidence. Not for a moment did he allow his true self to come to the surface.

"I know you and I will have a very delightful trip, my child," he said, still holding on to Joan's hands. "And I am sure I will be able to help you. I know a man in New York who is a famous specialist in mental diseases. I am sure he will restore your memory."

"Oh, you are too kind, dear Mr. Adler," murmured Joan.

"You must not call me that," he objected with a

smile.

"What do you want me to call you then?" she smiled in return.

"Daddy."

"Alright, daddy."

Sidney Adler bent forward, his face flushed.

"Now that I am acting as your daddy and you trust me," he said, "I may claim a daddy's privilege."

Joan suffered his kiss in silence.

But the moment he drew back she brushed her hand across her lips. While she did not express herself orally, she resented the liberty he took.

"What a lucky girl you are, Joan," Mignon Faraget broke the rather awkward silence which ensued. "And I really envy you the trip to New York."

"Well, why don't you come with us?" Adler grinned.

"I wish I could," she said, winking an eye.

But Mignon Faraget knew better than to trust herself into the hands of this man. For she had no desire to be sold into white slavery. She preferred selling herself.

"No, I don't think I'd want to take both of you," Adler remarked, his glance wandering from Mignon to Joan. "You two could never pass for sisters. You, Mignon, are as dark as a Spanish senorita. Joan here, is of the pure blond English type. I don't mind playing daddy to one."

Miss Faraget laughed.

"Then that lets me out," she said in mock complaint. "I am beginning to believe there is something in this new gospel about men preferring blondes."

"In this case, yes," replied Sidney Adler.

Joan was showing evidences of becoming reticent. Not that she had become suspicious. But Adler, fearing

this, renewed his efforts to keep her confidence.

And it did not prove a hard task. His repeated promise that he would do all in his power to see that her lost memory was restored, seemed to convince her that she had found a real friend indeed.

Sidney Adler now took charge of the situation. He demanded that he be permitted to defray all traveling expenses.

Mignon had no objections. For this meant that she could keep the money given her by Count Harcourt for the same purpose. Her part of the bargain consisted now of furnishing the unsuspecting Joan with suitable clothing.

Every little detail was arranged. The trip to New York was to begin the folowing day. The hour chosen was nine o'clock in the evening. For criminals of all classes always like to work under the cover of darkness. And Sidney Adler was a criminal of the worst type.

As soon as he had taken his departure, Mignon Faraget hurried to her boudoir. From there she called up the governmental palace.

Count Harcourt answered the phone himself.

"Everything is settled, Felix," she told him in a guarded tone. "The person in question will be removed to-morrow."

Chapter 86

FRANK WINTHROP

DONALD WHITNEY'S escape from prison had proven to be a very unfortunate affair. And he was unhappier by far than before he left prison that never-to-be-forgotten night. In addition to being kept in solitary confinement now, he was constantly tortured by the knowledge that Joan was here in Tunis; that she was in the hands of a woman like Mignon Faraget, and that she must be in grave danger.

Immediately after his re-arrest, during which he fought like a madman to free himself, he was subjected to rigid questioning. Colonel Gautier demanded to know who had been responsible in bringing about his escape.

But Donald stubbornly refused to answer any questions. He realized that it would avail him nothing.

Mignon Faraget, whom he believed to be Count Harcourt's mistress, would be the recipient of a neat coat of whitewash. The count would protect her and perhaps shift the blame on the shoulders of someone else.

Determined to avoid this, he remained silent and accepted his punishment for refusing to speak and maintaining stoical silence. But it was horrible to be incarcerated in a dark cell on a diet of bread and water.

It was worse to be deprived of his daily exercise. For this prolonged physical inactivity and endless brooding threatened to rob him of his reason.

Again and again there rose before his mind's eyes the picture of seeing Joan lying on the floor, unconscious.

And he had been torn from her side just as he was about to fold her in his protecting arms.

Hour after hour he spent trying to find a logical reason for Joan's presence in Tunis.

What had brought her here to this far-off part of the world? Who had been instrumental in tricking her into the house occupied by Mignon Faraget? Why was she being kept there and how long would she be forced to remain?

All of these questions which he asked himself, were unanswered. He would gladly have given every dollar he owned to be free now.

But while the unhappy man fought desperately to keep from losing his mind, a kindly fate took a hand.

Colonel Gautier contracted a severe cold. It developed into pneumonia, and he was compelled to relinquish his duties as prison director to Mr. Winthrop, his assistant.

It happened, however, that Mr. Winthrop was an American by birth. Like many others he had joined the French Foreign Legion and had come to Algeria to forget.

There was a time when Dr. Frank Winthrop counted his loyal friends and patients by the hundreds in New York City.

And perhaps he would never have been called upon to play the leading part in a double tragedy had he refused to wait on Mrs. Sylvia Horton, the beautiful young wife of Paul Horton, a close friend.

His hands would never have become stained with human blood had he refused to answer the urgent call of Sylvia that night in the dead of winter.

It was this call that sent him in search of an erring husband. For the erring husband was Paul Horton.

And then he found his own wife in the company

of this man — this false friend.

It was generally believed that the Hortons were an ideal couple and they were happy together. And there were numerous reasons for this belief.

Theirs had been a very happy marriage, during the three years that had elapsed since they joined hands under a great bell of white orchids on that blue-and-gold morning of one crystal October.

Perhaps the reason for their content lay in the fact that they had been not only sweethearts, but pals.

They had practised the prudent policy of give—and take; they had cultivated pleasures and pursuits, had held a common interest: they had been frank with one another—always.

For in love — as in business — both had agreed that "honesty was the best policy."

And they had not allowed the illusions of romance to engulf a proper appreciation of life's inevasible — and sometimes sordid!—facts.

Sylvia Aymes had been a remarkably pretty girl in her teens; in her early twenties — as Sylvia Horton—she was beautiful.

For out of the bright, clear depths of her eyes looked something that only happiness, in its supreme fulfillment, can bring.

The tremulous lips proclaimed it; and the rare sweet smile . . . and the very fragrance of the atmosphere, exhaled by her radiant young womanhood.

Paul was away to-day, on one of those frequent absences which his business made imperative.

But Sylvia was none the less joyous — planning for his return: the new dress she would wear, the new way she would arrange her hair — and — the new way she would "do" the potatoes!

She sighed — almost a purr — of contentment, re-

flecting upon the perfectness of their love; their wisdom in it — and their frankness! If all the married people had been as clever as they, the divorce lawyers would had to go to plowing for a living!

She smiled as she dusted Paul's faithful old Morris chair, bearing — an almost actual part of him — the imprint of his loved head.

She was thinking of something he had said in one of their long, intimate and "psychic" conversation rambles.

"No matter what arises in our lives, Sylvia, let us promise each other to have no secrets; even if it is another man — or another woman — we must be candid . . . and the other must agree to — understand."

She recalled his kiss that accompanied his words, the ardor of his deep gray eyes . . . the little confident laugh that trod swift upon the heels of his philosophy.

And he remembered her promise, as he had asked. For, as both came to concede, it was — The Only Way.

Two or three times Sylvia interrupted her task of "cleaning up" to run into the breakfast-room and glance at the clock.

She must allow at least thirty minutes to adorn herself for the delectation of love's eyes; it was almost a religious code with her that Paul must never find her flushed and smudged and blowzy from these necessary domestic duties.

She wished him to see only the shining exterior of the machinery, to feel only its smoothness.

His policy was a reciprocal one: she knew — as any sensible woman does—that his business was fraught with the usual cares and perplexities at the office; yet he never brought a frown or a grouch home to her . . . always he was smiling, or whistling — or singing some gay little fragment of love song.

Noon struck.

The train from Schenectady was due in half an hour; it would take at least a quarter to drive from the station to their apartment, so there were still fifteen minutes in which to fill the vases with roses from her window-gardens and overlook the tempting little lunch she had ordered Hop Lee the Chinese servant, to prepare.

Paul laughingly had remarked that without her personal touch, these appetizing meals she set forth would have been sadly lacking in flavor.

With everything rounded up to her satisfaction, Sylvia hastened to her dressing-room, there to array herself in the dainty lavender-and-white, simply-fashioned morning silk that her husband always insisted became her most — a cameo in a setting of amethyst!

His extravagant and flattering comparison had pleased her absurdly — as women are pleased by such compliments from the lips that they love.

The time for Paul's arrival drew near. It came. It passed.

She went to the telephone and called up the station. The train had pulled in on time. Then she rang the office. Mr. Horton had not been there, she was informed.

Disappointed, Sylvia hung up When had he ever before delayed coming to her just as fast as he could possibly get there? But she forced a smile.

Probably he had met some friend, a business acquaintance, who had detained him on the way!

She could not restrain a little frown of annoyance: for the first time since they had married she found herself resenting the obtrusion of such matters.

An hour went by. Then another half. At the termination of the second she rang Western Union, only to be told laconically that there was no message from

Schenectady or it would have been delivered!

This was strange indeed. If Paul had been detained unexpectedly in that city he would surely have sent her a wire.

She began to believe that something must have gone seriously amiss.

Chapter 87

THE ONLY WAY

S LATE afternoon brought its shadows — and its loneliness — Sylvia realized that her anxiety was fast assuming the proportions of dowright alarm. Something terrible had happened, she was certain of it — or Paul would never have acted like this! Her tortured imagination reached a thousand agonizing solutions, by night, only to be discarded and replaced by another racking thousand.

She must get in touch with his Schenectady connections at once: she must know. Her decision brought a ray of comfort: doubtless everything would be cleared up in some simple manner that would make her foolish fears quite ridiculous.

Paul probably had written and stuck the letter in his pocket, or he had left the sending of his telegram to some careless clerk.

A relieved smile came to her lips, softened the tense shadows in her eyes. She began to relax, to call herself all kinds of silly names for her childish unreason.

It was fully an hour before she could get Brandt's offices on the line.

It was the manager himself who answered, who informed her that Paul had left Schenectady two days ago, with important papers and a large amount of money for deposit in the New York bank!

Sylvia never knew how she finished the conversation. When it was ended she hung the receiver on the

hook, staggered, fell.

Hop Lee, shaking her by the shoulder — his rotund, stoical face for once betraying marked emotion —roused her hours afterward.

Sylvia stumbled weakly to her feet and to the nearest chair.

"What happened, Hop Lee?" she questioned blankly, memory for the moment suspended.

Her dazed eyes swept the room, dwelt upon the objects there as though they were unfamiliar things, not seen before.

"Postman beringee splecial letter. I come here — find like dlead."

Sylvia frowned, blinked. Then, recollection swept back with a rush. She held out an eager, shaking hand for the square white envelope she glimpsed in the Oriental's still taut fingers.

A letter from Paul!

She broke the seal tremblingly. Thank God, it had come at last: that her absurd fears were about to be scattered to the smiling winds.

Then she read:

Sylvia:

I must not call you "dear." I no longer have the right. I shall make my explanation brief. There is another woman. I have been caught in the grip of a passion so tremendous, so overpowering, that it is useless for me to fight against it. So I am keeping my promise to be frank — and relying upon yours to understand.

I shall never see you again. It is better so — and the only way. I am not worthy of you, Sylvia,

and I have one last request to make: that you will make a new life for yourself and not break your heart over a man who never deserved you.

Paul.

This time Sylvia did not faint. Like one who has been transfixed by a thunderbolt, she remained in one position — rigid, ashen, moveless as marble ..... and far more cold.

Hop Lee stood silently awaiting her orders.

The ticking of the mantel clock resounded through the room like a sledge hammer.

Only thirty seconds passed, but some eternities have been shorter. And when Sylvia Horton spoke her voice came as a hollow echo from a great, great distance.

"Ring Doctor Winthrop. Tell him that I am ill. Tell him to come to me at once."

Sylvia had no mother, upon whose loving bosom she might weep out her agony; no father's strong arm to steady her and fight her battles.

So it was that in her hour of sorest need she was driven to appeal to the one who was nearest — her old family physician and him who had been her guardian since babyhood, though whose wonderful wisdom and guidance she had been molded into the kind of woman she was.

He came immediately.

She sought to rise, to smile at his entrance; but all she could do was to hold out stiff hands — and look up into his kindly face with eyes that needed no language to tell him that tragedy lay here.

He placed her gently back in her chair.

Continued in next number

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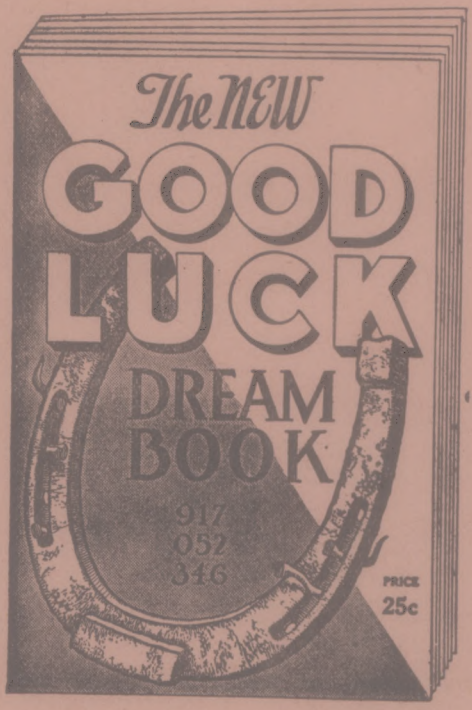

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